

Pleasance, Helen (2011) Lost Children, the Moors & Evil Monsters: the photographic story of the Moors murders. *Image & Narrative*, 12 (4). pp. 18-38.

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## **Lost Children, the Moors & Evil Monsters: the photographic story of the Moors murders<sup>1</sup>**

Helen Pleasance

**Abstract (E):** The persistent power of the Moors murders as a British cultural narrative is dependent upon the potent photographic images in which it is rendered. These images fall into three categories; the haunting snapshots of children who disappeared and were subsequently discovered to have been abducted and murdered, the desolate Yorkshire Moors on which their bodies were buried, and those of their murderers Ian Brady and Myra Hindley. These images, in Susan Sontag's words, provide "both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence." (15-16) It is in this play between presence and absence that their power lies. This article will examine these different images in order to explain their cumulative narrative power. The photographs of the children provide an uncanny archive of that which is irrevocably lost, articulated more starkly through the images of the moors to which they are lost. While the arrest photographs of Brady and Hindley work in the opposite direction, seeming to be a direct representation of an evil responsible for such a loss. The Moors murders narrative provides an extreme example of the dual ways in which photographs work as both absolute evidence of a reality that they capture directly, and as a haunting archive of loss. In examining this, the essay will suggest how, more generally, photographic narratives work strangely between concepts of the real and the spectral. Photographs always testify to things that really happened, while, simultaneously, replacing things that are permanently lost in the past.

**Abstract (F):** L'impact persistant des meurtres des marais ("Moors murders") comme un récit typiquement britannique dépend en grande partie des images photographiques puissantes qui le représentent. On peut distinguer ici trois groupes de clichés: les instantanés obsédants d'enfants disparus, puis retrouvés assassinés; les images désolantes des marais dans lesquels leurs corps étaient enterrés; les images des deux assassins, Ian Brady et Myra Hindley. Dans la terminologie de Susan Sontag, ces images offrent à la fois une "pseudo-présence et le signe d'une absence" (15-16). Leur pouvoir se situe exactement dans le jeu entre présence et

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<sup>1</sup> This article is part of a much longer PhD research project on the Moors murders. Longer discussions of Hindley as a biographical subject, and the place of the Moors murders in working class history are forthcoming.

absence. Cet article examine ces différentes images afin d'expliquer le pouvoir narratif qu'elles accumulent. Les photos des enfants constituent une archive insolite de ce qui s'est irrémédiablement perdu, tenu ensemble avec plus de force encore par les images des marais où ils furent perdus. Les photos de l'arrestation de Brady et Hindley, en revanche, produisent un effet antagoniste: elles semblent être la représentation directe du mal responsable de la perte. Les meurtres du marais sont un exemple superlatif de l'ambivalence photographique: d'une part elles sont la preuve ultime de l'existence de ce qu'elles captent; d'autre part, elles installent la hantise d'une archive de la perte. La lecture de ces tensions permettra de montrer que les récits photographiques oscillent entre les concepts du réel et du spectral. Une photo témoigne toujours de ce qui a vraiment eu lieu, mais en même temps elle prend aussi la place de ce qui s'est perdu pour toujours.

**Keywords:** Britishness, Moors murders, photography, Sontag, spectral

The Moors murders were events which took place in Britain over forty years ago, but they still have a powerful narrative presence in British culture. This presence is dependent on the ways in which the story about the violent loss of specific children maps onto wider cultural preoccupations with childhood, children and violence; how the particular story is used to tell a wider historical story. But it is also dependent on the visual form in which the narrative is rendered. The story of the Moors murders is a story of photographs. The dominant narrative is dependent on one way of reading photographs, as documentary evidence of real things that really happened. But I argue here that we need to approach this photographic 'evidence' in different ways in order to understand the discursive networks in which it is embedded and use it to tell a different kind of historical narrative. In telling the story of the Moors murders as a story of photographs I shall shift it from one kind of history to another. Instead of seeming to offer the spectacle of the past as it might be understood to have really existed, photographs will be viewed as spectral traces of a past that has inevitably disappeared. It is not the job of history to attempt to reconstruct the past into a series of definitive and ontologically certain events, but to suggest why certain spectral traces haunt us, and examine the stories we use them to tell.

The dominant story of the Moors murders depends on the invisible processes of realism, through which the repeated use of photographs produce what Bill Nichols has described as "a sourcebook for stereotype and spectacle" (237). The particular story that is

constructed through the codes of realism is taken to be *the* singular story of what happened. One way of challenging this narrative as history might be to produce a different spectacle, using different photographic evidence. But a more fundamental challenge can be made by examining the photographic ground on which such spectacles are produced. Rather than the mechanisms of photographic representation being made invisible, they should become the focus of attention. The forms through which the past is made present should be treated as actively constructing that past. As Jacques Derrida has argued, we need a history that examines the effects of these forms: “to render an account of the effects of ghosts, of simulacra, of ‘synthetic images’ ” (94). Through analysis of the Moors murders as visual narrative, it is this shift from the spectacle of history to the haunting spectral traces of photographs for which this article argues. It is by understanding the ways in which photographs actively construct our sense of reality that we can grasp why the Moors murders haunt British culture in such powerful ways.

### **From the Spectacle of History to the Spectacle of Narrative**

The original front cover of Duncan Staff's *The Lost Boy* (2007) and that of the later paperback edition (2008) provide a good starting point to understand how the repeated use of the central photographic images of the Moors murders have produced the kind of “stereotype and spectacle” to which Nichols refers (see figs. 1 & 2). These covers render the Moors murders in powerful visual terms. Significantly, through photographs, we seem to be taken back to the origins of the Moors murders as an historical event. The first cover superimposes the image of Keith Bennett over a shot of police and dogs on the moors; the second superimposes the image of Myra Hindley in place of Bennett. All are instantly recognisable from the repertoire of images through which the Moors murders first came to light as a news story in the 1960s. The photograph of Keith Bennett first appeared in the local press in the summer of 1964 (see fig. 3) when he went missing from his home in Manchester. In October 1965 his image returned to the news along with those of other children who had gone missing from the Manchester area between 1963 and 1964, when it was suspected that they had all

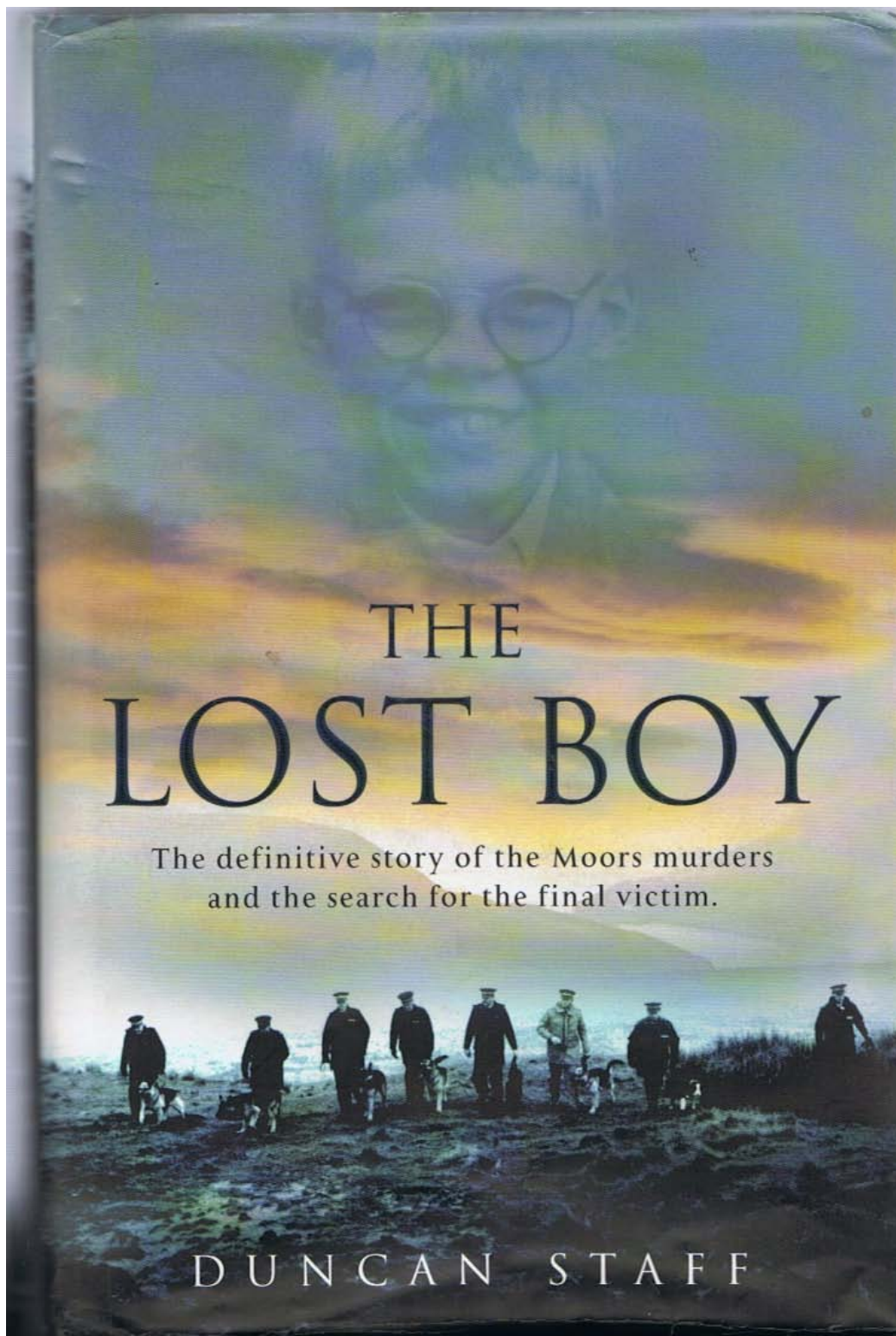


Fig. 1: Front cover of the hardback edition of *The Lost Boy* (2007).

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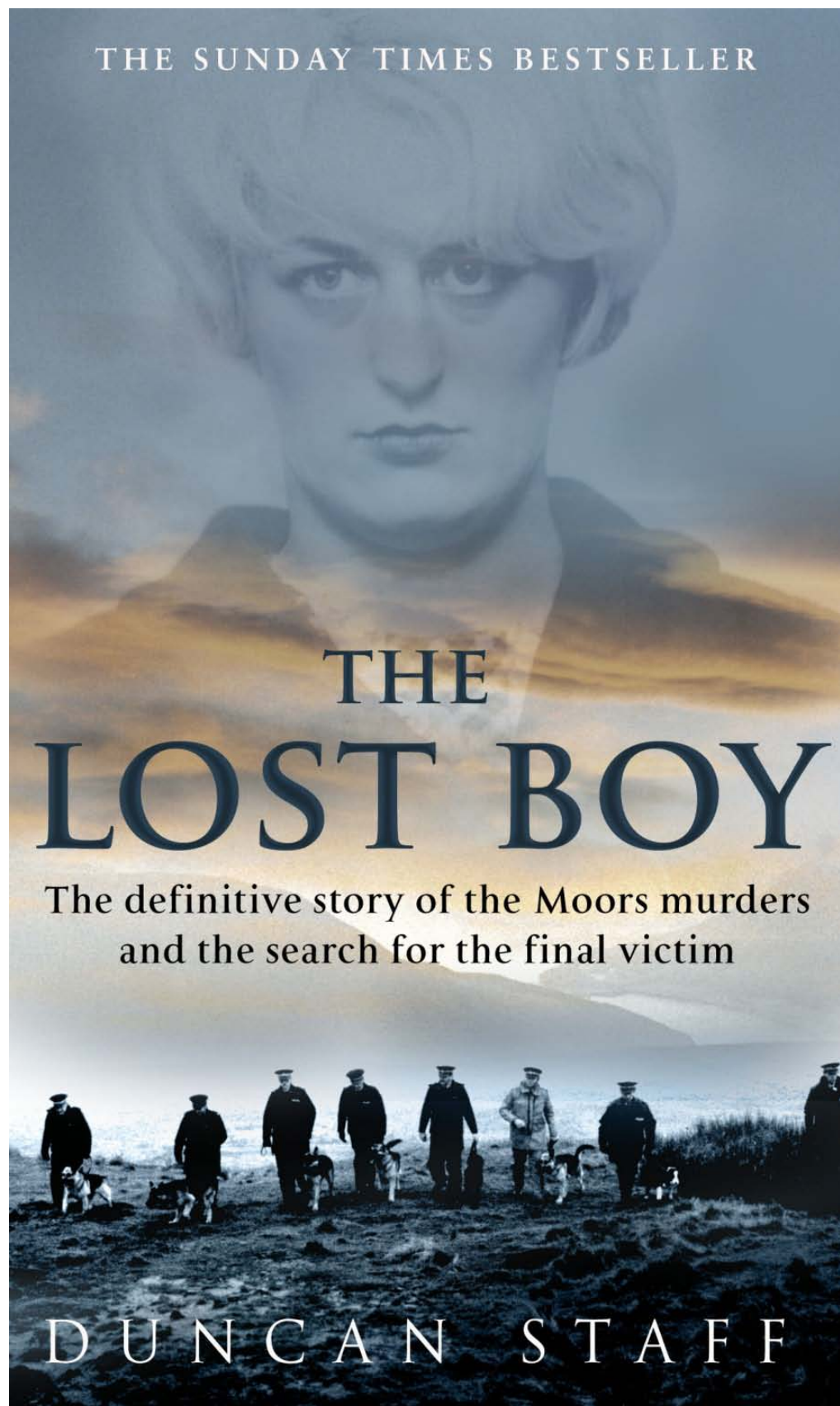


Fig. 2: Front cover of the paperback edition of *The Lost Boy* (2008).

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been abducted, murdered and their bodies buried on Saddleworth Moor in Yorkshire.



The discovery of the bodies of two of those children, Lesley Ann Downey and John Kilbride on the moors in October 1965, was reported across the national and international news. The moors were evoked both photographically and in television images. Audiences experienced the moors, as a BBC 1 TV News report of the discovery of John Kilbride's body phrased it, "from the spot". The images provided visual evidence of the moors as a real landscape. These images were supported by vivid descriptions of the moors in examples from the *Gorton & Openshaw Reporter*: "search for bodies on lonely moor" (1); in the *Daily Mirror* as "wild moorlands" (1); and, in the *News of the World*, as "high in the fog-shrouded Yorkshire moors last night, detectives and police scientists crouched over a shallow grave" (Nott 1). Such descriptions reinforce the physicality of the moorland space, but they also evoke the moors as an imaginative and narrative space: they draw on the Gothic tradition where the moors contain secrets, and have a particular emotional affect<sup>2</sup>. This was perhaps imagined most clearly in Gothic dimensions by *Time* magazine, which used a quote from *Wuthering Heights* to frame an article about the discovery of Lesley Ann Downey's body, "Ghosts on the Moors" (54). However, when these imaginative and narrative dimensions are experienced through photographic spectacle they are read as historical reality.

The image of Keith Bennett and the moorland search are used on the cover of *The Lost Boy* to evoke this earlier moment; they allow us to see the Moors murders as an historical event. We 'see' the moment of the loss of a specific child. Its narrative dimensions, though, are invoked silently and invisibly. The ability of these photographs to produce

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<sup>2</sup> Helen Birch and Claire Grant have both referred to the Gothic dimensions in which the moors signify in renditions of the Moors murders. Birch describes the "special resonance" of the moors as "a place of mystery in the national imagination, their wild beauty an invitation to fantasy" (43). Grant argues that "the remembrance of the Moors murders figures the moors as a deeply cathected space, a site around which narratives of suffering, sorrow and anger are built up" (140).



Fig. 3: Report of the disappearance of Keith Bennett (Gorton and Openshaw Reporter, 3 July 1964).

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historical spectacle lies in their seemingly direct representation of their referents. Roland Barthes has described this as “the special status of the photographic image: *it is a message without a code*” (17). Similarly, Nichols argues that the documentary form “activates conventions that prepare us to expect a privileged status for the indexical link between sign and referent” (230). It is this link that “anchors the image in the specificity of a given moment” (230), so that viewers experience the images “as subject [...] to the vicissitudes of history rather than the coherence of narrative” (231). Rather than being a message without a code, it is truer to say that the codes of photographic messages are invisible. It is through such invisible codes that the past seems to be made unproblematically present. Rather than the construction of a particular narrative, we seem to be presented with *the* narrative of what really happened; the spectacle of history.

Thus in the photographic representation of the Moors murders on the two covers of *The Lost Boy* we seem to be given the singular historical narrative. These images clearly refer to real people who were involved in very real and troubling murders. Keith Bennett was a real little boy who went missing from home in June 1963. Myra Hindley and Ian Brady eventually confessed to his murder and the burial of his body on Saddleworth Moor in 1986<sup>3</sup>. His remains have never been found. It is this referentiality that seems to be made present by the book covers. What is invisible, though, is the process of reading these images as powerful narrative tropes, which is necessary for the story to make sense. The photographs are simultaneously signs of a referential reality beyond their frame and constructed narrative devices which interpret that reality. As Linda Rugg has argued, about reading photographs, “the trick is seeing both the material body and its constructed nature at the same time” (19). The spectacle produced by the front covers of *The Lost Boy* is a narrative spectacle, which tells a very particular story about the significance of the Moors murders.

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<sup>3</sup> Brady and Hindley were convicted in May 1966 for the murders of John Kilbride and Lesley Ann Downey, whose remains had been discovered on Saddleworth Moor in October 1965, and with the murder of seventeen year-old Edward Evans. It was a witness account of the murder of Edward Evans that drew police attention to Brady and Hindley and the evidence that led to the discovery of the children’s bodies on the moors. Brady was convicted of all three murders, Hindley with the murders of Lesley Ann Downey and Edward Evans and of harbouring Brady knowing that he had killed John Kilbride. In 1986 Brady and Hindley confessed to the murders of Keith Bennett and sixteen-year-old Pauline Reade, who had gone missing in July 1963. Their confessions led to a renewed police search of Saddleworth Moor. Pauline Reade’s remains were discovered in July 1987.

It is, perhaps, in the replacement of Keith Bennett's photograph with that of Myra Hindley that the narrative dimensions of these images become most clear. Since its first publication across the British press at the end of the Moors murders trial in May 1966 the arrest photograph of Myra Hindley has achieved a national iconic status. It evokes a whole body of ideas about the meaning of the Moors murders because of its repeated use, particularly by the British tabloid press, to create the figure of 'evil Myra'. The spectacle of Hindley, as rendered in the arrest photograph, evokes, perhaps more than any other image, the visual power of the Moors murders. But it can only be understood by reference to all its previous incarnations; to its history as an image<sup>4</sup>. Helen Birch, for example, has argued, "the image of Myra Hindley and the bizarre grip it holds over the public imagination has become detached from its subject" (33). The spectacle of Hindley cannot be understood without understanding this construction of her as a monster. Once the construction of Hindley can be seen in terms of the narrative trope of monstrosity, then Keith Bennett and the moors can also be seen in terms of their narrative construction. The story achieves, in its narrative tropes, the dimensions not of history but of fairy-tale or myth; lost, innocent children who return as moorland ghosts to tell the secret of how they met their end at the hands of evil monsters.

A brief examination of the titles of Moors murders texts provides a sense of the archetypal terms, of the loss of innocence to evil, in which the story has been repeatedly rendered. *Monsters of the Moors* (Potter, 1967) and *Satan's Children* (Sparrow, 1966) were both published in the immediate aftermath of the Moors murders trial. *Devil's Disciples* (Wilson, 1986) and *Return to Hell* (Wilson, 1988) appeared when the story returned to the news with Brady and Hindley's confessions to the murders of Pauline Reade and Keith Bennett. Emlyn Williams in *Beyond Belief* (1967) and Pamela Hansford Johnson in *On Iniquity* (1967), both published immediately after the trial, also render the story in these terms. Williams likens Brady and Hindley to "some unfamiliar and repulsive beast" (367), while rendering the lives of their victims in terms of innocence and working class decency. He describes Lesley Ann Downey's final Christmas (she was abducted and murdered on Boxing Day 1964) in these terms: "For the Downey kids, this Christmas did not fail in the expected excitements. It was once more amazing how much fun could be got out of little – a

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<sup>4</sup> Hindley's construction as a monster has been examined in various forms. Belinda Morrissey, Elisabeth Storrs, Therese Murphy and Noel Whitty have discussed the implications of her construction as monstrous for female criminality more generally. Marcus Harvey's painting, *Myra*, and Gordon Burn's novel, *Alma Cogan*, both interrogate the image as a constructed icon. Carol Ann Duffy's poem, *The Devil's Wife*, engages with the mythic dimensions of Hindley's construction as evil.

foot-high tree, tinsel, watching the empty stocking till the eyes droop into sleep. [ . . . ] But Lesley's prize present was from her mother, a tiny electric sewing-machine" (31). Similarly, Johnson describes Brady and Hindley as "monsters" (16) and constructs their monstrosity in relation to what they did to childhood innocence: "for the murders of Lesley Ann Downey and John Kilbride, I think there can be no retribution" (96)<sup>5</sup>. *The Sun's* report of Myra Hindley's death in 2002 uses the photographs to repeat this archetypal narrative of innocence and evil and present it as historical reality. Its front page depicts Hindley as 'the devil', via her arrest photograph (see fig. 4). This is juxtaposed against images of the moors and the snapshots of her victims to render their lost innocence against her evil (see fig. 5).

In presenting these photographs as historical reality we can see the paradoxical process that John Jervis describes between representation and reality, in which the success of representation assumes "a reality beyond" (16), but in that same assumption, "representation makes itself real, abolishes reference, asserts its self-sufficiency. It oscillates between real and unreal" (16). The visual presence of the Moors murders through photographic representation achieves this abolition of reference. In seeming to refer always to "a reality beyond" (Jervis 16) the frame the photographs present themselves as history, but what they make present is their own powerful narrative. It is how these images construct a narrative in which "representation makes itself real" (Jervis 16). In the next section I shall argue that the ways in which childhood is understood as a category of innocence, and Hindley's criminal body as categorically evil, are both dependent on the history of photographic representations of children and criminals. It is by examining these histories that the haunting presence of the Moors murders as historical narrative might be understood. It is by examining this that the power of the narrative as an interpretive device for working class experience can be understood.

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<sup>5</sup> Johnson significantly leaves Edward Evans out of this equation of innocence and evil, for two reasons. Firstly his was never a body on the moors, that of a lost child. Secondly seventeen year old Evans had apparently gone willingly with Brady for consensual sex. This account is impossible to prove as it is entirely dependent on Brady and Hindley's unreliable version of events. But what is important is that the construction of Edward Evans as a sexually active gay man makes it impossible for Johnson to fit him into a narrative of innocence and evil. As Cathy Hawkins has argued, "despite the cruelty of his death, Evans is not the "pure" victim sought by the monster hunters" (6).

## Spectral Children and the Working Class Criminal

Carolyn Steedman and Allan Sekula have both cited the emergence of photographic representation in the mid-nineteenth century as fundamental to ways of looking at working class childhood. Steedman makes the link between the construction of working class childhood as “beauty in sordid surroundings, [ . . . ] an already thwarted possibility” (66) and the documentary photographic representations in which specific children were represented as such: “this literal depiction of working-class childhood was connected to the emergence of photography as a means of representation” (65). Sekula has noted how photography allowed



Fig. 4: *The Sun*'s report of Myra Hindley's death (16 November 2002).

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Fig. 5: Following Hindley's death *The Sun* remembers the narrative of the Moors Murders (16 November 2002).

© News Group Newspapers Ltd.

the “honorific” function of painted portraiture “to proliferate downward” (345) allowing the poor to possess photographic likenesses of their loved ones. He cites how this has been viewed in terms of “the salutary effects of photography on working-class family life” (346). The photograph can be seen as evidence of the child as an object of love. Sekula argues that this honorific function operates in “a double system” (345) of representation, which is also



capable of operating “repressively” (345). The repressive function is most evident in the emergence of the criminal mugshot. This will be discussed in terms of how Hindley’s arrest photograph functions against those of the children. But first I will develop further how the photographs of lost children can be used to interpret wider working class history; how they construct working class children as objects of beauty, hope and possibility worth honouring, but always vulnerable to particular violences or exploitations of working class experience that might thwart that possibility. As I write about these photographs as interpretive devices for wider history I am aware that they refer to specific children whose deaths were not just narrative events but material tragedies. My argument is primarily concerned with that historical significance, rendered in narrative, but I am aware that it is dependent on and always haunted by real people who really died. There is clearly an ethical responsibility in writing about these children. I don’t wish to contribute to the violence done to them with further textual violence, but to open up debate about how we understand issues of violence against children.

The Moors murders took place within the very specific urban, industrial working class community of Manchester. The children who return as ghosts on the moors are specifically children of the poor, urban working classes of Manchester and its environs. Lesley Ann Downey came from Ancoats, Keith Bennett from Longsight, Pauline Reade from Gorton and Edward Evans from Ardwick; connected Victorian, inner city suburbs to the east and south of Manchester. These areas, by the 1960s, were considered slums, and were undergoing clearance by the City Council. John Kilbride came from Ashton-under-Lyne, a Lancashire mill town six miles east of Manchester. It is the way that the Moors murders narrative maps onto the much more complex discourses of class, through which such lives and their thwarted possibilities (Steedman 66) are more generally understood, which gives it its power as working class history. Its gothic tropes, particularly in their photographic representation as visual narrative, produce what Julian Wolfreys has called the spectral gothic: “a spectral mechanism through which social and political critique may become available and articulable” (11). It is in this light that the figures of lost ghosts on the moors provide a poetics for wider working class experiences of violence and loss: for working class life as shaped by violence and loss from the outset. The figures of these ghost children haunt other discourses about class, violence and children, and can be used to interpret these from a previously unavailable narrative point of view. It produces, through the figures of specific murdered children, a view of working class childhood as innocent, but vulnerable to the brutality of external forces.

The pop group The Smiths' rendition of the Moors murders in their 1984 song *Suffer Little Children* exemplifies how the narrative can be used as a "spectral mechanism" (Wolfreys 11) to articulate the poetics of working class childhood and violence. The song can be read as a complex use of Williams' *Beyond Belief*, the best-selling narrative account of the Moors murders, to locate lyricist and lead singer Morrissey's own Manchester childhood within the frame of its gothic narrative of violence and loss. The song invokes the haunting tropes of John Kilbride and Lesley Ann Downey's ghosts on the moors: "We are on a sullen misty moor / We may be dead and we may be gone / But we will be right by your side / Until the day you die". If these lyrics are read as an address to Brady and Hindley they could be understood as framing the narrative in the same terms as Williams; that it is the individuated evil of Brady and Hindley that is responsible for the loss of the children. But various features of the song open it up to other readings. The overarching feature is Morrissey's view of the Manchester he grew up in (born in 1959, his childhood overlaps those of the Moors victims) as a violent place, and his own childhood as marked by violence:

Morrissey recalled the Manchester of the sixties as having been a violent place. On one particular occasion, at a fairground in Stretford, he was hit by a thug simply because he had been standing in the wrong place at the wrong time: 'You accepted it, there didn't have to be a reason.' (Bret 8)

This rendition of Manchester culture is markedly different from Williams', and is present in the song's lyrics. Rather than locating the horror of the Moors murders directly on Brady and Hindley, it is located on Manchester in the repeated refrain, "Oh Manchester, so much to answer for". This Moors murders' narrative can be seen to be used to narrate the kinds of violence in which Morrissey felt his childhood to be embedded.

The first person address of the song develops this narration. Morrissey takes on the voice of a ghost child on the moors: "I'll haunt you when you laugh / You might sleep / But you will never dream / Oh... / Over the moors, I'm on the moor / Oh, over the moor / Oh, the child is on the moor". This voice clearly identifies Morrissey with the figures of John Kilbride and Lesley Ann Downey, so that the figure of the lost child on the moors comes to represent Morrissey's experiences of a Manchester childhood and the child on the moors stands for his interiority in Steedman's definition: "the child within was always immanent – ready to be drawn on in various ways – and, at the same time, always representative of a lost realm, lost in the individual past, and in the past of the culture" (10). As with Williams, this rendition of childhood provides a poetics of working class experience. The "you" that is being addressed in the song also becomes a confused figure, which could be Brady and

Hindley, but also the personified Manchester, who has so much to answer for; whose violence has turned its children into ghosts on the moors.

Ironically, the text of *The Lost Boy* can also be read, against the spectacle on its cover, as opening up the narrative to interpretations of wider working class culture. What is most significant about Staff's account is the way he renders not only the Moors murders victims as emblems of violent loss, but how he also renders Myra Hindley as a "thwarted possibility" (Steedman 66) of working class experience. In doing this he opens up ways of making connections between the photographic construction of the lost child and that of the working class criminal. Keith Bennett's childhood is rendered via the memories of Alan, his brother, and Staff's narration of those memories. Staff uses details given to him by Alan Bennett, to give material shape to the brothers' childhood; the boys' shared bedroom "in a small terraced house", the "two scrappy white goal lines they painted on the adjoining redbrick wall" (9) and the nights spent at their gran's, to give "their mam a break" (10), to present a picture of working class life as "an enclosed, secure world" (10). In some ways it is a very similar rendition of working class culture to that of Williams in *Beyond Belief*. This rendition of working class auto/biography conforms to particular conventions by which readers can place themselves within the narrative structure; other children who grew up in terraced streets will recognise the landscape as their own and will be able to map their own histories into the narrative. It is in this process that the loss of Keith Bennett can symbolise other kinds of losses experienced in a working class life. The photograph of the little boy in his National Health glasses also enables this, as it locates Keith Bennett in a cultural history that others will recognise, and which enables them to read their own histories through his. This historical significance of Keith Bennett was reiterated in the *Daily Mail's* online report of a memorial service held for him in Manchester Cathedral on 5 March 2010. It reports a family friend's description of him as: "happy, wondrous, caring [ . . . ] a truly lovely Manchester boy". The identification of him with a particular culture further enables others to read their own histories through his.

Staff also narrates Myra Hindley as part of working class culture, but, unlike earlier accounts, he does not seek to expel her violence from that culture into the realm of individual iniquity or monstrosity. The effect of this is to present her childhood, in the same way as Keith Bennett's, as "an already thwarted possibility" (Steedman 66). In previous narrative accounts of the Moors murders, Hindley's childhood had been deployed as evidence of her

incipient deviance<sup>6</sup>. But here Hindley is narrated as an understandable product of working class culture. The first section of *The Lost Boy*, entitled *Manchester*, uses a quote from Hindley as its epigraph: “I am a child of Gorton in Manchester. Infamous, I have become disowned, but I am one of your own” (21). Staff locates Hindley’s cultural formation in this industrial landscape: “The Gorton that shaped Myra Hindley had a distinctive set of rhythms. The time people got up, the paths they took to work, the sounds that came from the factories were repeated day in, day out” (27).

Significantly, Staff narrates domestic violence as part of this common experience, and Hindley as formed by it. In particular he depicts her father, Bob, as a violent man. Staff narrates the cultural centrality of violence through Hindley’s recorded accounts of various incidents she remembers from her childhood home, and summarizes that: “The scenes at 20 Eaton Street did not attract the attention of the authorities as domestic violence was part of life” (42). It is, though, the specific details of Hindley’s autobiographical accounts of domestic violence that insert that violence into the poetics of working class experience. One such incident, recorded by Staff, is worth quoting in full. An understanding of the working class home emerges in the concrete details that are rendered here, as well as the narrative significance that Hindley and Staff ascribe to her response to this violence:

Every week they had a bath, taking turns in the tub which stood in front of the open fire. Nellie (Myra’s mother) topped it up with hot water from a pan on the stove. At the age of five, Myra was waiting her turn when she spotted Bob’s shaving things in front of the mirror on the hearth. Myra smeared shaving soap on her face, stood on tip-toes on the tiled fender and scraped at her smooth skin with a table knife. Bob appeared behind her, asked what she thought she was doing, and cracked her round the head, spraying the mirror with flecks of foam. But Myra refused to cry. (43)

The weekly bath time ritual, evoked through the details of the tub, the open fire and hearth, makes present a recognisable working class family home, familiar from other narrative renditions of working class life. This whole ritual speaks of the attainment of decency in difficult circumstances; all the small details tell of the effort required to keep clean. But it is then juxtaposed with an act of casual violence. It is in this moment that Hindley’s character is formed; her refusal to cry is what gives the event its narrative point. It makes Hindley a

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<sup>6</sup> For example, the story of her excessive grief at the death of a childhood friend, Michael Higgins, is told in both Williams (118-120) and by Jean Ritchie (6-8) as evidence of her extreme and obsessive personality.

heroine of this situation. She is viewed as overcoming violence, to become a survivor rather than allowing herself to be a victim of it. Again, this is a familiar trope from fictional and autobiographical renditions of working class experience. But the brutalisation that this response produces is also narrated as an explanation for her psychological ability to be involved in the abduction and murder of children. Forensic psychiatrist, Malcolm MacCulloch is quoted by Staff: “ ‘The relationship with her father brutalized her,’ he commented. ‘She was not only used to violence in the home but rewarded for practising it outside’ ” (50).

Staff is careful to emphasise the normality of Hindley’s childhood against the abnormality of the murders in which she was involved, so as to avoid a direct causal relationship between her childhood experience and adult behaviour. But the insertion of violence into the poetics of working class experience has a profound effect on the understanding of working class life in general; the “enclosed secure world” (10), which the text renders, of Alan and Keith Bennett’s childhoods is the same world as that of Myra Hindley’s earlier childhood, with its family rituals and community bonds, it is a world in which “domestic violence was part of life” (42). So that, while the text emphasises that most people, whatever their childhood experiences, have not been involved in child murder, it does understand her capacity for this involvement in murder within wider social relations of violence. This violence then haunts the Moors murders narrative in a way that it did not in earlier renditions. Staff inserts violence into a poetics of working class life recognisable in *Beyond Belief*, altering fundamentally Williams’ overwhelmingly benign rendition of working class culture, as I argue *The Smiths’ Suffer Little Children* also does. *The Lost Boy* does not sever the Moors murders from working class culture as earlier renditions did. Nowhere is this more striking than in Staff’s treatment of Hindley’s arrest photograph. His reading of the photograph deconstructs its dominant meaning as evidence of singular and mythologised evil. He does this in two ways; firstly, he refers to Hindley’s autobiographical account, in a letter to him, of the moment that the photograph was taken, and her understanding of this as a crucial narrative moment in the public mediation of her identity: “Myra told me that she thought she was going to be interrogated, and clenched her teeth defiantly in expectation of a slap. Instead, there was a blinding flash of light – a police photographer had captured her image” (199).

This rendition provides the tools for a different narration of its referent. Hindley’s stare at the camera is narrated, not as the visual evidence of her subjective evil, but as defiance and a refusal to show fear at a moment when she assumes she is going to be



subjected to violence. This repeats the motif of the earlier narrative account of being hit by her father and refusing to cry. Staff further develops an understanding of the photograph within wider relations of violence by commenting, not on the singular aberration of Hindley's appearance in it, but on her similarity to a picture of her father in a local pub: "I pulled out my laptop and opened pictures of father and daughter. The faces staring out of her arrest photograph and from the bench of the Steelwork are surprisingly similar" (44). The physical likeness can be read in terms of the cultural inheritance of violence that Staff sees Hindley as acquiring from her father. Taken together with Hindley's narration of the photograph as a moment of defying the fear of violence, these two readings produce a much more troubling understanding of Hindley's subjectivity.

The face of Hindley in her arrest photograph here becomes a very complex construction of working class violence. Hindley is the subject of the photograph because of her own violent actions, but her subjectivity has also been formed through relations of violence. Like Sekula, Richard Ireland has identified the criminal mugshot as producing the working class criminal subject, who then becomes a particular object of scrutiny. Ireland argues that "the camera was a product of confidence in science and technology and in turn became its tool, possessing the capacity for objectivity so significant for Victorian notions of positivist, empirical scientific method" (71). Through photography, "criminality might be quite literally 'brought to light' by the apparatus, which could penetrate the dark mass of urban anonymity of the 'criminal class' to isolate, individualize, and label" (72). John Tagg, identifying the same constructive process, argues that photography, and the criminal mugshot in particular, becomes a "technology of power" (19), through which state institutions survey and control the urban poor. Claire Grant's interpretation of Hindley's account of the moment that the picture was taken is interesting in this regard. She argues that Hindley's "mugshot is an image that condenses law's violence and the fearful coercive power of the state" (137). Through this interpretation of the photograph, Bob Hindley's tutoring of his daughter to fight could be seen as preparation for the violent relations between the poor and the state. The criminal mugshot becomes one conclusion of the thwarted possibilities of working class childhood. Read against this, Hindley's expulsion into the realm of monstrosity involves a cultural disownership of the complex relations of violence and class in which her subjectivity might be seen to be formed. The archetypal terms of evil and innocence through which the Moors murders have been dominantly rendered resonate through working class culture to specific effect: the figure of the innocent working class child lost to brutality and evil is a

powerful interpretive device for the violences to which working class lives are more generally subject. But there is a cost. In expelling Hindley from culture there is a refusal to examine the wider social relations of violence in which her subjectivity was formed. Returning to photographs, and examining their discursive construction and narrative meanings, is one way of beginning to tell more complex stories about children and the violences to which they might be subject. One such story is the ghost story of Hindley's arrest photograph, haunted by the violent relations through which it was formed. I hope it is a story I have begun to tell here.

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